



# TEXAS JUVENILE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

## Response to the Independent Ombudsman Third Quarter Report, FY 2020 July 29, 2020

The Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) has received the FY 2020 Third Quarter Report from the Office of the Independent Ombudsman (OIO), and appreciates this opportunity to respond and provide updates.

### TJJD updates

The third quarter was the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Texas, and TJJD quickly implemented necessary measures to respond to this crisis. As the OIO points out, TJJD suspended all in-person visitation following the Governor's disaster declaration. As a result, TJJD expanded its capabilities at each facility to provide virtual visitation to our youth. Connection is a core tenet of the Texas Model, and it is critical for the youth to be able to visit with family members, mentors, volunteers, and the OIO. TJJD appreciates the coordination and partnership with the OIO on ensuring our youth could still meet with OIO staff during this unique time.

Additionally, TJJD implemented several infection control measures at each facility to prevent, as much as possible, the spread of disease on campus. Gatehouse health screening measures—including temperature checks—were implemented at each secure facility and halfway house, groups on campus were kept as small as possible, and common areas are thoroughly and regularly cleaned to ensure no surface cross-contamination. Additionally, all staff on the facilities are required to wear a face mask, and proper social distancing and personal hygiene measures are enforced. All of these procedures remain ongoing at each TJJD facility.

While responding to the pandemic, TJJD was also able to continue Texas Model program development. Over the third quarter, TJJD fully implemented the youth service team meetings at each secure facility. This is a youth-focused group of facility staff who regularly review the youth's progress in programming. TJJD's case management team was also able to further develop the intensive intervention program at each secure facility. This program acts as the primary level of TJJD's intervention spectrum for youth who engage in violent or aggressive behaviors. Youth are provided pointed redirection and programming grounded in dialectical behavior therapy until such time that they are able to either return to regular programming or their behavior warrants moving to a higher level of intervention, such as the Redirect or Phoenix programs.

In May, the TJJD Board approved changes to Texas Administrative Code procedures regarding youth behavior management. As previously reported, these changes will finalize the new

violence intervention continuum and lay the foundation for TJJD's youth accountability processes. TJJD continues to work with stakeholders to further develop these new procedures.

#### Incident trends

Positive incident trends across the five state secure facilities continue, with a 29% decrease in all youth-on-youth assaults or unauthorized contact from the second quarter FY 2020 to the third quarter FY 2020. There was also a 7% decrease in youth-on-staff assaults or unauthorized contact from the second to the third quarter.

As in the second quarter, the Ron Jackson facility had the biggest decrease in total rule violations of youth-on-staff assaults or unauthorized contact, which decreased by 40% from the previous quarter (43 in Q2 to 26 in Q3). The most significant decrease in incidents highlighted by the OIO was at the Evins facility, where total use of restraints decreased by 14% (503 in Q2 to 433 in Q3); youth-on-youth assaults or unauthorized contact decreased by 53% (134 in Q2 to 63 in Q3); and youth-on-staff assaults or unauthorized contact decreased by 9% (125 in Q2 to 114 in Q3).

TJJD continues to operate a female Phoenix unit. This program adds a level of behavior modification and accountability that did not historically exist at TJJD, which likely helps lead to the decrease in total aggressive incidents at the Ron Jackson facility. While TJJD continues to plan on the expansion of both the male and female Phoenix programs, some changes were momentarily delayed due to the necessary response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The boy's program is now operated at both the Mart and the Evins facilities, and it will be fully operational (and expanded) at the Evins facility once TJJD deems it is appropriate to do so in light of necessary pandemic precautions.

TJJD continues to actively monitor all incident trends at each facility. While the agency-wide decrease in violent or assaultive incidents provides support for the intervention principles of the Texas Model, there is still much work to do. Now, more than ever, the strong partnership with the OIO is critical to our successes on these efforts. TJJD will continue to coordinate virtual visitations with the youth and the OIO as long as the current safeguards remain necessary and in place at each facility. As TJJD continues to respond to this evolving pandemic, the agency will also continue pushing forward with Texas Model implementation, program development, and the strategic mission and goals of the agency. As always, TJJD will rely on the OIO's assistance to ensure those goals are met.

TJJD appreciates the opportunity to respond and provide an update to this OIO Report.